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ABSTRACT

Symposium participants were divided among "providers" of social science knowledge and "consumers." Objectives addressed by these participants were: (1) to examine the extent of existing knowledge in the behavioral sciences area; (2) to analyze actions needed to make this knowledge available in useful form; and (3) to identify governmental actions required to increase the applied benefits of this knowledge. Recommendations included the following: (1) a systematic approach by the federal government in communicating its research needs; (2) establishment of a national conference on the role of the social sciences in the solution of national problems; (3) a continuous effort by social scientists to inform public personnel of the potential of social science knowledge to contribute to implementation of social policies; (4) efforts to increase the flow of social data to operating agencies; (5) inclusion of a utilization plan in final reports of commissions and task forces; and (6) establishment by Congress of rotating professorships for behavioral and social scientists and graduate students within the Library of Congress to research and analyze relevant public policy issues and to advise Congress. A roster of participants is appended. (CJ)

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# SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

# SYMPOSIUM ON APPLYING KNOWLEDGE FROM THE BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES TO SOCIAL LEGISLATION PROGRAMS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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**ADVANCED STUDY PROGRAM**

The Brookings Institution
Washington, D. C.

CONDUCTED
at the request of

THE U. S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION AND WELFARE

October 28-31, 1970

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# SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Symposium on Applying Knowledge From the Behavioral Sciences to Social Legislation Programs

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Department of Health, Education
and Welfare

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Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations *

Roster of Symposium Participants

( The sixteen participants whose names are identified with an asterisk contributed to the final formulation of the recommendations. )

* The conclusions and recommendations embodied in this report are those of the participants and do not necessarily represent those of the trustees, the officers, or other staff members of the Brookings Institution.

## SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The participants in this symposium were asked to address the following objectives:

> To examine the extent to which existing knowledge in the behavioral sciences is used in planning, modifying and implementing government supported programs in health, employment, education, welfare, transportation, housing, urban renewal and related programs.
>
> To make an analysis of actions required to make such knowledge available, understandable, and useful to officials at all levels in the decision making and program implementation process.
>
> To identify actions required in the legislative, executive, and judicial processes to increase the benefits derived from applications of knowledge existing in the behavioral sciences.

The participants were divided among the "providers" of social science knowledge -- behavioral and social scientists affiliated with universities and other private institutions, including representatives of professional associations -- and the "consumers" of such knowledge -- Federal executives, most of whom had been trained academically in the behavioral and social sciences, with direct program responsibility for Federal social and research programs. A third, smaller but overlapping group consisted of individuals with substantial experience in systems analysis and information processing.

It was clear that representatives of these groups, while speaking the same language, had sharply differing perspectives on the nature of the problems inherent in gaining a wider relevance for behavioral science contributions

to the decision making process. The following summary of the discussions is taken from a verbatim transcript of the meeting. It has not been cleared with the participants, and all of them may not agree with every recommendation.

Some Federal program directors, while recognizing and articulating their need for help, have a tendency to lose patience with the kind of assistance offered by academic scientists. They perceive the latter as offering only "long range research," provided that the program director can specify the research direction required. In many agencies there is no agenda for research as such. Rather, the Federal executive is dealing with a series of policy and program directives. The program director complains that the academic scientist simply does not see the researchable questions flowing from policy problem areas.

Academic scientists admit to a communications gap -- that they are often out of touch with policy problems. They do see their primary contribution as research, but also claim considerable sophistication for contributing to policy and legislation in-the-making. Scientists recognize, also, that they do not look at problems from a "cost benefit" or ' allocation of resources" perspective. They rarely cast their research questions as "which of several options is likely to be more successful," or "which program will have a superior payoff." Scientists can readily sympathize with the Federal executive's dilemma in being forced to make choices with limited data. On the other hand, they are inclined to fault him for his failure to see that more fundamental

research must often be done before the question he is interested in can be explored in a researchable form.

Considerable effort was expended during the symposium in exploring why a better "fit" could not be developed between government needs and academic contributions. A major limitation emerges from current academic institutional arrangements and the incentive system for behavioral scientists. As was noted, a scientist who offers gratuitous advice to the government is often applauded by his colleagues; and, equally often, he is ill-informed. Conversely, his career is not helped, and may even be hindered, if he comes to Washington to try to make a relevant contribution.

The communications gap and the problems of making research relevant are well documented. A number of agencies have had repeated experiences of failure when they have brought behavioral and social scientists together with agency executives to attempt to identify government research needs. In this connection a recommendation was proposed to the effect: "That a systematic review should be made of the process in identifying the government's research needs." Or, as posed alternatively in a question, "Can we review and research out why the 'fit' isn't better when we put scientists together with government research people to identify research needs and to establish a research agenda for an agency." Although there was wide general support for the need, other participants objected to doing more "research on research," and the recommendation was never formalized.

During examination of the first symposium objective, the participants treated "behavioral science knowledge" in a broad context.* While many of the findings of the behavioral sciences are documented in research reports, and particularly the journals, even more perhaps, are directly available from individuals. Consultants perform an important "brokerage function" in bringing knowledge and expert views to bear on agency problems. The limitations of recorded wisdom were mentioned: narrowly focused research which has little generalizability; theoretical results which are difficult to apply; outdated results; and the dangers of applying research results erroneously to the wrong domain of decisions, etc. The participants concluded generally that it is more profitable to create data banks of "experts" than to try to create data banks of research-based knowledge.

In response to their examination of the first objective, the participants concluded that, although some behavioral science knowledge is being used in decision making, the use is far from adequate.

The participants, in turning to the second and third symposium objectives, agreed upon ten recommendations. The problem of communication, referred

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*During the discussions the participants made a distinction between "behavioral science" and "social science." Behavioral science was characterized as "more experimentally based," "more rigorous," and, to use the participant vernacular, "more hard-nosed." Nevertheless, the group felt that the more inclusive group -- social scientists -- does have an important contribution. Having articulated the distinction for themselves, the participants then used the terms interchangeably in working upon their recommendations.

to earlier, generated a great deal of discussion, especially in working through the first two recommendations. The first recommendation suggests a systematic approach by the Federal government in communicating its research needs:

> 1. That the Federal agencies, under the leadership of the Executive Office of the President, identify what they believe are the problem areas to which particular social science research should be directed, and develop and publish annually their long range research needs for the information of the Congress, the social science community, and the public at large. The Congress and the Independent Commissions should likewise indicate their long run research needs.

The group recognized the limitations in this proposal. Government policy problems are concrete and interdisciplinary, and have certain idiosyncratic, contingent features. These represent a different order of problem than that to which the disciplines are accustomed to addressing themselves. In the past, the "translation" from stated need to researchable question has been poor. The translation requires a genuinely creative effort which has been lacking. There is a real requirement for a joint statement of policy research objectives -- by the people doing research and those who need it.

To get around this problem initially, the conferees recommended that the agencies identify "what they believe are" the problem areas. As several participants complained, "we don't even know what the government people perceive as the problems." There was recognition, too, that the initial survey would be a "laundry list" of needs, but that even this would be a major step

forward. Hopefully, in later publications the Executive Office would synthesize the agency requirements for social science research for insertion as an appendix.

Of course, this publication could become a "wish list." Some research would be funded by the agencies, and some not. This, of itself, could provide some interesting insights, both to publishers and readers. In any event, it was felt that the list should not be limited, or become a list of "priorities." The priorities would emerge from the frequency and urgency of the stated needs. This publication, particularly if assessed alongside a comparable list of Congressional research needs could be extraordinarily valuable, not only to the behavioral science community, but to the Executive Office of the President as well, as it goes through the exercise of compiling agency requirements.

The communication chain has more than one link, and the second recommendation was seen as a companion to the first:

> 2. That appropriate professional associations and concerned universities increase their efforts to alert their interested members and constituents to researchable questions generated by public policy problems.

Government participants, in particular, were eager to gain the benefit of the "brokerage function" the associations could serve. There was limited but vocal resistance to this recommendation. Some scientists feel that the associations serve a specific purpose for their membership, and should not push government research. There was agreement that there exist special

associations for which this task would be quite appropriate, such as the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues. Several association representatives, on the other hand, felt that this activity was an important role for the associations, who try to improve the relevance of their members' research. They argued, further, that the associations were the logical place to develop the data banks of "expertise" which could be made available to government planners and decision makers. The final compromise was to call on "appropriate associations" and "concerned universities" to undertake these efforts.

Some participants pointed out that there is another type of information which should be circulated to the academic community. Questions asked publicly around town -- by Members of Congress at hearings or by the heads of agencies -- are action forcing events which open the door to possibilities for individual research. This kind of information may best be circulated in newsletters of the professional associations.

A wider network of communications would be created by the third recommendation:

> 3. That a national conference on the role of the social sciences in the solution of national problems be convened by the professional associations, Social Science Research Council and the National Research Council.

Some were lukewarm to this proposal out of fear that it could become "just another conference." Even they, however, felt that such a conference could be invaluable if properly organized. Strong endorsement was expressed for a genuine commitment on the part of government to participate. This should not be just another "trade association meeting."

Communication should flow both ways, which led to the recommendation:

> 4. That the social science community make a continuous effort to inform legislators and agency personnel of the potential of social scientists and of social science knowledge to contribute to the formulation and implementation of social policies.

It was generally conceded that association executives are in a good position and have an obligation to perform this educational service.

The importance of recognition by government agencies of their need for behavioral science inputs into their program planning, led to the next recommendation:

> 5. That government agencies equip themselves with effective social science capability to identify the social components of technical, economic or other aspects of their program problems.

Many programs, such as highway safety, new modes of transportation, and new public health programs, are so heavily laden with engineering and technical considerations that the behavioral components are often overlooked. This

has proved costly in the past. Agencies whose programs would appear to be least affected by the human equation are the most vulnerable.

Nor should "advisory boards" serve exclusively to satisfy this need. Advisory boards, according to some government participants, typically serve as a mechanism to ratify agency staff work. To have any real impact, behavioral and social scientists must be moved into the agencies.

To encourage systematic data collection and its use in decision making, the group endorsed a recommendation that has been made before:

> 6. That efforts be made to increase the flow of social data to operating agencies at all levels of government; and that continuing systems of social indicators be devised, collected, maintained and published regularly; and that a Council of Social Advisers be created which would report annually to the President and to the Congress.

The "continuing systems of social indicators" involves the collection of "time series" data from which longitudinal inferences can be drawn. While endorsing the work currently being done in the Office of Management and Budget, the group felt that this proposal encourages a considerably expanded effort. OMB is attempting to compile data already collected by government agencies. These data are not systematic and are mostly "static." A creative effort -- similar to that performed by the economists some years ago -- is required to devise and collect comprehensive data about the "social state of the Union."

Oddly enough, many participants came to the symposium strongly opposed to the creation of a Council of Social Advisers. Some had even testified in Congressional hearings against proposed legislation that would create such a body. After reexamining the issues, however, the group felt that the legislation and structures should be created to provide the necessary information for the development and articulation of social goals, and for creating systematic programs for the achievement of those goals.

Many participants felt that the Council of Economic Advisers ideally should be expanded into a Council of Economic and Social Advisers. Such a council could provide comprehensive advice and guidance to the President. In turn, a Joint Economic and Social Committee of the Congress could review legislation comprehensively in light of national needs. Current reality suggests, however, that it may prove easier to create a new Council of Social Advisers than to tamper with present institutional arrangements. In some later government reorganization the two councils and their joint committee counterparts in the Congress could be meshed.

Great stress was laid upon the need to begin. It will be several years before a Council of Social Advisers can provide the sophisticated guidance now provided by the Council of Economic Advisers. But with a legislative requirement for annual reporting, it was felt that this sophistication would come more quickly.

The remaining recommendations were aimed at covering specific problems. Current research studies, and commission and task force reports often provide

useful findings but little or no guidance to policy makers as to how they might best be implemented. Often the individuals who study a particular problem are in a superior position to suggest alternative programs for utilizing the findings. Therefore, the participants recommended:

7. That the final reports of commissions, task forces and policy related research include a plan for the utilization of the findings; that these reports be published; and that grants and contracts for this type of research include funds earmarked for the development of plans for their utilization and, when desirable, for efforts to communicate the findings to relevant parties that go beyond the publishing of the report.

As indicated earlier, social and behavioral scientists believe that they have a contribution to make to policy in-the-making. One obvious contribution is testimony before Congressional subcommittee and commission hearings. This requires, however, that those who might provide important testimony be alerted in advance to the fact that hearings will be conducted. To utilize more effectively the potential contributions of social scientists, the group recommended:

8. That Congress and the Federal Commissions, and their counterparts at the State levels, make greater efforts to:
(a) give notice of their hearing dates and subject matter;
(b) and announce these hearings further in advance.

Another area of contribution is advising Members of Congress and Committee staff personnel. To help provide this, the group recommended:

9. That the Congress establish rotating professorships for behavioral and social scientists and graduate students within the Library of Congress to research and analyze relevant public policy issues and to advise Members of Congress and the staffs of Congressional Committees.

One and two year appointments within the Legislative Reference Service would provide adequate time for behavioral scientists to make a significant contribution to the legislative process. An equally important gain, moreover, may be the exposure of academic behavioral scientists to problems of national significance and the manner in which they are resolved. Upon returning to their institutions, they would be in a better position to offer more relevant academic training to their students.

Finally, recognizing that there should be a stronger institutional representation in the capital for the behavioral sciences, the participants recommended:

10. That the social and behavioral science community give consideration to the creation of a national social science organization, such as the National Academy of Sciences, which would be located in Washington.

Again, there was some opposition to the creation of "another" organization. Recognition was given to the Behavioral Sciences Division of the National Academy and to the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Mental Health. Nevertheless, the group concluded that the behavioral sciences need a prestigious organization which can serve as a "hub" and a clearing house for an expanded behavioral science contribution to governmental decision making. This institution, it was agreed, should be funded like an academy but should be independent of government.

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
Advanced Study Program

Symposium on Applying Knowledge from the Behavioral Sciences to Social Legislation Programs

October 28-31, 1970

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